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Guest columnist

American prisoners are alive over there

PITTSBURGH — At first I was very skeptical that there were any Americans left alive in Southeast Asia. But after talking with scores of Vietnamese, I learned that many of them had heard about Americans held in Southeast Asia.

It also became clear that the U.S. intelligence community had never made a concerted effort to gather and collate the intelligence data that exist about MIAs. If that data were properly evaluated, I'm certain it would yield a conclusion different from the normal answer that's given to a congressman who asks about MIAs — that there probably aren't any left alive.

Even though some individ-

ual intelligence officers pursued this issue, their efforts were discouraged by previous administrations.

There have been press reports about the existence of reconnaissance photographs that may indicate Caucasians — perhaps Americans — are being held in camps in Laos. Our satellites are able to discern the differences in height between Asians and Caucasians.

When the Vietnamese say there are no Americans alive in Vietnam, that may be true. But they haven't said there are no Americans alive in Laos. I'm also convinced that the Vietnamese know where some of our prisoners are buried.

I recently interviewed a

Don Bailey, a Pittsburgh attorney and former congressman, won a Silver Star in Vietnam.

Vietnamese refugee who spent seven years in a re-education camp. He said other inmates told him there were American prisoners who were alive, who were being held. I was skeptical, but now I'm convinced there are American prisoners alive in Southeast Asia.

And if there are, how could we leave them there without doing everything we possibly can to help them? That's what tears at me, the possibility that they are there, and we haven't done anything to help them.